

*Orders of Romania:
A Collection of Articles*

Part II

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1. Author's Foreword

This work contains five new articles that I have written on Romanian Orders since the June of 2008. While the first two have already been published in Finnish in the Journal of the Numismatic Society of Finland, the remaining articles await to be published in the spring of 2009. The reasons why I have proceeded to publish these now in English are many and varied, but there are two basic ones. First, I have given myself a set of goals that simply cannot be reached in the timeframe I want, if am to follow a schedule of writing six articles a year. Secondly, I have been supported and been given so much positive feedback since I have started publishing regularly that I wanted to give something back in return and I didn't want you to wait until the summer. So this is my New Year's present to you. Enjoy.

26.1.2009, Vaasa, Finland,

Antti Ruokonen

2. Order of Ferdinand I ”Ordinul Ferdinand I”

The Order was founded on the 10th of May 1929 and confirmed by law on the 18th of May 1929 “for the everlasting memory of the founder of our state, King Ferdinand I, to be awarded for merit in uniting all Romanians into a single nation”. The founding of the Order highlighted the territorial expansion of Romania and its transformation into a unified nation. Since this Order bears the name of a Romanian King, it is noteworthy to study the man behind it.

Ferdinand was born in Sigmaringen, Germany on the 24th of August 1865 and was christened as Ferdinand Victor Meinrad of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen. His parents were Prince Leopold of Hohenzollern-Sigmaringen and Antónia princess of Portugal. Ferdinand lived a relatively peaceful life, until his uncle, Charles I of Romania, intensified his search for an heir after 1881¹. Due to Charles’ childless marriage, the status was first offered to Ferdinand’s father, Prince Leopold, and his older brother William. They both refused and so the choice fell on Ferdinand. The selection was announced on the 18th of March 1889² and Ferdinand moved permanently to Bucharest in the same year. Ferdinand married Princess Marie of Edinburgh in 1893 and the future Crown Prince and King, Charles, was born in the same year.

After Charles I died on the 10th of November 1914, Ferdinand was crowned King of Romania as Ferdinand I. In his oath before the parliament, he promised to “rule like a good Romanian”. Despite his German roots, he remained loyal to this oath and led Romania into the 1st World War on the side of Entente, after promises of territorial acquisitions, on the 27th of August 1916. Romanian military was not adequately prepared to wage war on this scale and after fierce battles; most of the country was occupied by the Central Powers, while only Moldavia remained under Romanian control. Despite this, Romania stayed in the fight until 1917 and was able to remain independent after hard-fought victories in Moldavia. The collapse of Russia left Romania encircled by hostile powers and she was forced to sign an armistice and finally a peace-treaty with the Central Powers on the 17th of May 1918. Ferdinand refused to sign the peace-treaty and after Entente had knocked Bulgaria out of the war, Romania re-joined the fray on the 10th of November 1918. In the various treaties’ followed by Germany’s defeat and surrender in the same year; Romania’s allies honored their promises and after peace finally came to Europe, Romania’s territory more than doubled. Ferdinand was crowned King of the new Greater Romania on the 15th of October 1922.

¹ Charles I was crowned King of Romania on the 10th of May 1881

² Ferdinand had held a commission in Romanian army since 1886

In the following years Ferdinand's Romania was granted a more democratic constitution, followed by numerous political and landowning reforms that had the Kings support. Ferdinand was able to keep his country politically stable, which helped the various ethnic groups to grow together. Like his predecessor, Ferdinand did have problems ensuring continuity of the Monarchy. Crown Prince Charles' marriage with Princess Helen of Greece in 1921 was not a happy one, though they gained a son, the future King Michael. Due to marital problems, this marriage was finally undone and Charles gave up his place in the line of succession voluntarily in 1925. As a result, his under aged son Michael was made Crown Prince.

Ferdinand finally died on the 20th of July 1927, losing a long battle to cancer. Since Crown Prince Michael was only 6 years old at the time, 3-person regency³ began to rule the nation in his stead.

Ferdinand was a shy and quiet man, which in turn meant that he was also a rather reserved King and while being competent and hardworking, he couldn't reach same heights of popularity with the people as Charles I. Despite his strong family ties to Germany, he stayed true to his peoples' wishes during the 1st World War. More importantly, he has able to uphold and advance stability in internal politics in post-war Romania, when the country needed it the most.

The Order

The Order contained six classes from the Collar to the Knights Cross and it was awarded exclusively to Romanians. The Order was sparingly awarded and during its existence it ranked highest within the Romanian hierarchy of Orders, alongside the Order of Charles I. Only when a recipient held Collars of both these Orders was the Order of Charles I given precedence. The Order of Ferdinand I was not awarded after the 30th of June 1937, but its use was not discouraged until the end of the Kingdom in 1947.

Numbers conferred were limited in the regulations of the Order on the 30th of June 1930⁴:

Collar	5
Grand Cross	10
Grand Officer	25
Commander	40
Officer	50
Knight	70

The limitations were altered with a royal decree on the 24th of April 1933 as follows:

³ The regency was composed of Charles' brother, Prince Nicolai, Miron Cristea Patriarch of Romanian Orthodox Church and President of the Supreme Court, Gheorghe Buzdugan

⁴ A royal decree dating to 20.12.1930 stipulates that these numbers do not include awards conferred to members of the Royal House

Collar	8
Grand Cross	15
Grand Officer	40
Commander	60
Officer	75
Knight	100

Signs of the Order

The basic form of the Order consists of a double emerald green monogram of Ferdinand I coated with enamel. A royal crown with a red enameled background sits atop the cross and above it, a ring for the ribbon.

Collar

Those conferred with the Collar were also conferred with the Grand Cross of the Order. If the same person was awarded with Collars of the Order of Charles I and that of the Order of Ferdinand I, he was only allowed to wear one⁵. According to a decree made on the 28th of April 1932, these persons would wear the Cross of the Order suspended from a Collar consisting of four blue “F” letters.

Grand Cross

Worn on a sash and the breast star on the left side of the chest. Silver-gilt and emerald green enamel. Width of the Cross 43 mm, height with crown 68 mm. Obverse and reverse are identical. Breast star is silver-gilt, diameter 73 mm.

Grand Officer

Worn on a broad ribbon around the neck and the breast star on the left side of the chest. The Cross is identical to that of the rank of Commander. Breast star is silver-gilt, diameter 72, 5 mm.

Commander

Worn on a broad ribbon around the neck, Silver-gilt and emerald green enamel. Width of the Cross 43 mm and height with crown 69 mm.

Officer

Worn on a small ribbon with a rosette on the left side of the chest. Gilded silver and emerald green enamel. Width of the Cross 31 mm, height with crown 50 mm.

Knight

Worn on a small ribbon on the left side of the chest. Silver and emerald green enamel. Width of the Cross 31 mm, height with crown 50 mm.

Ribbon: Watered, dark blue, with a slim red centre stripe flanked by golden stripes.

Measurements

Class	Width	Golden stripe	Red stripe
Grand Cross	100 mm	18 mm	3 mm
Commander	35 mm	6 mm	0,5 mm

⁵ As exemption to this rule, King Charles II wore both Collars.

Officer	35 mm	6 mm	0,5 mm
Knight	35 mm	6 mm	0,5 mm

The Order was manufactured Zimmermann in Pforzheim and supplied by Court-jeweller Joseph Resch & Sons in Bucharest.

Medal of Ferdinand I – Medalia Ferdinand I

Medal of the Order was founded simultaneously with higher Classes of the Order⁶ by the Crown council and it was conferred on the same basis, but for lesser merit. The Medal continued to be conferred in large quantities after the 12th of November 1937, when conferring of the higher classes of the Order ceased.

The Medal has a diameter of 31 mm, is made from bronze. its obverse contains the Kings left facing portrait surrounded by the legend ” * FERDINAND *I* REGE * AL * ROMANIEI ” (Ferdinand I, King of Romania). Reverse contains the image of the sign of the Order with the year “1914” above it and “1927” beneath. A royal crown and the ribbons attachment loop is affixed to the medals top rim.

The Medals ribbon is 34-37 mm wide, dark blue, with a 5 mm violet centre stripe. Recipients serving in Romania’s armed forces carried crossed swords affixed to the ribbon.

⁶ 10.5.1929/18.5.1929

3. Order For Merit ”Ordinul Pentru Merit”

The Order was founded by King Charles II in four classes on the first anniversary of his return to power, on the 5th of June 1931. First crosses were conferred on the 8th of July 1931. The Order was divided into Civil and military divisions and both of them were meant to be conferred with swords for merit during times of war. The intent was formalized into the Orders regulations on the 19th of December 1938, but the swords were later abolished on the 30th of June 1941. The Order For Merit existed outside the hierarchy of Romanian Orders in its first form, since the King conferred it personally for services rendered for the Crown, especially significant cultural achievements or for extraordinary meritorious civil service. The Order was seldom conferred during the reign of Michael I and ceased altogether after the Kingdom was abolished in 1947.

During the reign of Charles II Romanian system of Orders and Decorations underwent significant changes and many new Orders were founded. It is therefore valid to better acquaint with a ruler, who has given so much to the Phaleristic field.

Charles II was born on the 3rd of October 1893 in Sinaia as the first-born of Crown prince Ferdinand and Princess Marie. He was the first King of Romania to be born in Romania and the first to be baptized according to the orthodox faith. Charles received a thorough education in his youth and he also demonstrated intellect and administrative skill at an early age. After the death of Charles I and proclaiming of his father as King Ferdinand I on the 10th of November 1914, Charles became the Crown prince at the age of 21. When Romania joined the 1st World War two years later, Charles served in the Romanian military.

At this time Charles had an affair with the wife of a military officer, Ioana Lambrino, which resulted in a scandal. After this matter was solved Charles took a long diplomatic meet-and-greet tour in the middle-east. After his return, Charles was soon married to Helene, Princess of Greece on the 10th of March 1921 in Athens. The marriage did not last long, but Prince Michael, the future King, was born as a result. The marriage started to crack soon after Michael's birth and Charles began a new serious affair with the daughter of a chemist, Elena Lupescu. Rumors of the affair began to circle during 1923 and its seriousness became apparent after Charles ran off with her, settling in Paris in 1925. This journey was followed by an intense exchange of letters and as a result, Charles voluntarily gave up his position and rights as the Crown Prince of Romania. In the beginning of 1926, 6-year old Prince Michael became the heir to the throne by an act of Parliament.

King Ferdinand succumbed to cancer after a long struggle on the 20th of July 1927 and Michael was crowned King of Romania as Michael I. Due to his young age, a 3-man regency was appointed in his stead to rule the country. This arrangement did not prove to be a lasting solution. The great depression that began in the United States hit Romania in

full force in 1929 and combined with the volatile internal politics, the country was in need of an adult monarch on the throne. When Prime Minister Iuliu Maniu suggested to Charles that he return to Romania as one of his sons' regents, he took the suggestion to heart and returned on the 6th of June 1930. After overcoming his political rivals in a game of intrigue, the Parliament overturned the law of the 4th of January 1926, which had removed Charles from the line of succession. He became King of Romania as Charles II on the 8th of June 1930.

During Charles' rule Romania's economy slowly recovered and the cultural life started to flourish, but internal politics remained confusing: Between 1930 and 1938, Romania had 11 governments. As the 1930s came to a close, Romania's economic growth had stabilized, while internally politics still failed to stabilize. The people grew disaffected with the old political parties and the far-right⁷ continued to grow in strength and popularity. Charles felt that in order to govern more effectively, he had to take personal charge of the situation. The constitution was altered in February of 1938 so that the King was able to appoint half of the Senators in the upper chamber of Parliament and to suspend Parliament for a maximum of one year at a time. Other restrictive laws followed which transformed Romania into a de facto royal dictatorship under King Charles.

Charles' rule was supported by the strong economic growth of the late 1930s, but events in the political world stage cut Charles' rule short. Hitler's Germany had started the 2nd World War in 1939 and waged it successfully with Stalin's backing. Charles had old ties to the Allies, but shifting balance of Power drew Romania into Germany's sphere of influence. While Western Europe was engulfed in war, Stalin used the opportunity to reclaim lost territory in the East. This included Romanian provinces of Northern-Buchovina and Bessarabia. Stalin gave Romania an ultimatum to evacuate these provinces under the threat of war on the 27th of June 1940 and Charles was forced to submit under pressure from both Germany and Soviet Union. Prime Minister Gheorghe Tătărescu took the blame and resigned. Charles tried to win more favor with Germany and shifted his regime toward the far right. The Iron Guard received more power and anti-Semitism became a part of the country's official policy.

In the long run these acts served to dig the ground beneath Charles' feet and two more blows followed in the same year that Charles' shrunk support among the people, politicians and within the military couldn't handle. Hungary saw that its chance had come to receive compensation for the territories it had lost in the 1st World War and demanded the return of Transylvania under a threat of War. War in the Balkans did not fit into Germany's plans for the region and the Axis powers forced Romania to accept their negotiated settlement. Accordingly, Northern Transylvania was ceded to Hungary on the 30th of August 1940. Charles had been forced to submit again. The Greater Romania that was created during Ferdinand's rule was falling to pieces without a shot being fired in its defense. First serious signs of trouble came as the Order to retreat from Transylvania caused rebellion within the army.

⁷ Iron Guard in Romania

The proverbial last straw came when Northern Dobrudja was ceded to Bulgaria only a few later, again without armed resistance. After losing his support in all sections of society, Charles proclaimed martial-law and gave general Ion Antonescu⁸ dictatorial powers to rule the country on the 4th of September 1940. Within a day general Antonescu gave King Charles an ultimatum with the support of old political parties of Romania to give up the throne and leave the country. Charles officially gave up the throne on the 6th of September 1940 in favor of his son Michael and left the country with his long time mistress Lupescu.

Charles finally settled in exile in Portugal, from where he still made some unsuccessful attempts at reclaiming the throne. He died of a heart-attack in Portugal on the 3rd of April 1953. Charles was an intelligent, gifted ruler and a great patron and supporter of cultural life. He lacked self-restraint, moral courage needed to do important decisions and a sense of duty, which is an especially important personality trait for a monarch. On family matters Charles was distant and cold towards his son Michael and did not prepare him for his role as the future King.

Signs of the Order

The Cross of the Order consists of a white enameled rounded Maltese cross, which arms are circled by a gilded crown of thorns. The centre of the Cross holds the gilded monogram of Charles II. The reverse is polished and bare.

Conferring of the Order was limited as follows:

Class	Romanian	Foreign
Grand Cross	12	6
Commander	24	12
Officer	48	24
Knight	96	48

The limitations do not apply to conferrals made during times of war. According to the best knowledge of the author no Finn was awarded with this Order during the Kingdom Era.

Grand Cross

Worn as a breast star on the left side of the chest.

Commander

Worn on a broad ribbon around the neck, gilded silver and the obverse white enamel. Diameter of the Cross is approximately 43 mm.

Officer

Worn from a pin on the left side of the chest.

Knight

Worn on a small ribbon on the left side of the chest.

⁸ At the time Minister of Defence and Chief of the General Staff

*Cross*⁹

Worn as above.

Ribbon: Watered with three more or less equally wide stripes; green – dark blue – green.

Class	Width	Blue stripe
Commander	43 mm	15 mm
Officer and Knight	37 mm	11 mm

The so called “War ribbon” is similar, but with added 3 mm wide golden edges.

Honour Cross of the Order “Crucea de Onoare Pentru merit”

The Cross of Honour was founded in two classes on the 26th of November 1937 by King Charles II, alongside a general re-organisation of the Order. The Cross was awarded according to the same principles as higher classes of the Order, but for lesser merit. This Cross could be awarded with swords for merit during times of war, but this provision was discarded on the 30th of May 1941.

Description of the Cross of Honour

The Honour Cross is a Maltese cross, with balls decorating the eight tips of the Cross’ indented arms. The centre holds a miniaturized sign of the Order on dark green base. The reverse is bare, with the centre sometimes holding a mark of a manufacturer.

1st Class

Silver and the miniaturized sign of the Order white enamel and gilded silver. Diameter is approximately 54 mm and that of the centre 22 mm. Worn on a broad ribbon around the neck.

2nd Class

Same as above, but with different proportions. Diameter 43 mm, centre 20 mm. Worn on a small ribbon on the left side of the chest.

Ribbon: Watered, green with five identical blue stripes.

1st Class: 43 mm, blue stripes approx. 2 mm.

2nd Class: 37 mm, blue stripes approx. 1,5 mm.

The wartime ribbon has 3 mm golden edges as with the higher signs of the Order.

The Order today

The Order For Merit was reinstated in the great reform of the Romanian Orders and Decorations system in 2000 as the third national Order, outranked only by the Order of

⁹ Replaced with the Honour Cross on the 26th of November 1937.

the Star of Romania and the Faithful Service Order. This means that the Order is only conferred to individuals for especially meritorious acts that have furthered the national interests of Romania. Ambassadors who have served a certain term of office are also awarded with the Order. When conferred to a foreign citizen, the conferral must be approved by foreign nations' government. The Order can also be awarded as a consequence of meritorious conduct during military operations and under these conditions the Order can also be awarded to military units. The Grand master of the Order is the President of Romania.

The Order and its appearance have gone through several changes during its long hiatus. A Grand Officers class has been added beneath the Grand Cross and Cross of Honour has been replaced by a three-class merit medal. The Star of the Grand Cross is now accompanied by the usual ribald-fastened Cross and finally the Officers class is now worn on a small ribbon on the left side of the chest.

The Sign of the Order now consists of two superimposed Crosses. The Cross beneath is made of striated silver and the above made of white enamel with silver edges in the Knights Cross and silver gilt in the upper classes. The obverse centre holds the National Coat of Arms of Romania with the reverse centre holding the year 2000 surrounded by the legend "Pentru Merit" (for merit) along with three stars. The Cross of the Order is attached to its ribbon via an oval laurel leaf wreath. The Star of the Order holds a Commanders Cross in its centre, with seven silver rays shining outwards between the arms of the Cross. These rays are also filled with diamond shape patterns. A further nine golden rays shine outwards from the tips of the Crosses' arms. Stars reverse holds the attachment pin, name of the manufacturer¹⁰, silver content mark and the individual Crosses' conferral number.

When conferred to soldiers during peacetime, there are two crossed swords between the Cross and its wreath and during times war, the swords run through the centre of the Cross.

The ribbon of the Order is 40 mm wide in the Classes of Knight and Officer, grey with 5 mm black stripes 2 mm away from the edges. With the Classes of Commander and Grand Officer the ribbon is 45 mm wide with 6 mm stripes 3 mm from the edges, while the Grand Cross's ribald is 100 mm wide with 14 mm stripes 7 mm from the edges. When conferred for merit during times war, the ribbons have golden edges between 2 and 7 mm in width, depending on the Class.

Diameters of the Crosses

Class	Diameter
Grand Cross (with Star)	60 mm (75 mm)

¹⁰ The National mint, Monetaria Statului.

Grand Officer (with Star)	50 mm (65 mm)
Commander	50 mm
Officer	40 mm
Knight	40 mm

Conferral restrictions and conferrals

The peace time conferral of the Order to Romanian nationals is limited to the following numbers:

Class	Civil	Military
Grand Cross	150	50
Grand Officer	300	100
Commander	625	225
Officer	1500	500
Knight	3000	1000

The maximum number of Romanian Knights during peace time is thus limited to a total of 7500.

Conferral of the Order 2000-2008

Class	Romanian	Foreign	Total
Grand Cross	44	68	112
Grand Officer	67	91	158
Commander	142	233	375
Officer	245	103	348
Knight	1153	50	1203

The Order has been conferred 2196 times in its contemporary form. In addition, the Order has been conferred to four Romanian soldiers with swords for merit during a time of war¹¹, four military units and five institutions. Known Finnish recipients are Pekka Harttila, Finnish Ambassador to Romania 2000-2004 in 2004 and the late vice-speaker of the Parliament Kerttu Törnqvist in 2000.

The Merit Medal of the Order

The Merit Medal was founded in three classes with the Orders higher classes in the year 2000. It is awarded to Romanian and foreign citizens for important services rendered for the Republic of Romania. The obverse of the medal holds an image of the Cross of the Order, reverse holds the legend “Pentru Merit” (For Merit) and the medal attached to its ribbon via a familiar oval laurel leaf wreath. 1st Class of the medal is made of gilded silver, the 2nd of silver-plated tombak and the 3rd Class of bronze coloured tombak. Diameter of all the classes is the same; 35 mm. Ribbon of the Medal is also similar with

¹¹ The recipients have participated in military operations as members of international organisations such as NATO or the UN.

all classes; white with three black 3 mm stripes 2 mm from the edges, total width is 35 mm.

Award restrictions and awarded medals

Class	Limitations	Awarded		
	Civil / Military	Civil / Military	/Foreign	
1 st Class	2000 / 400	27 / 69	/12	
2 nd Class	4000 / 400	80 / 127	/ 3	
3 rd Class	- / -	856 / 638	/ 5	

Maximum number of awardees is therefore set at 7200. Up to this point, the medal has been awarded to 936 Romanian civilians, 834 Romanian military personal and 20 foreign citizens. In addition 10 Romanian soldiers have received the medal with swords. The 3rd Class of the medal does not have any awarding restrictions and as per custom, the restrictions concerning the higher classes do not concern awards given during times of war or medals awarded to foreign citizens.

Like the Order, the Medal is manufactured by the state mint of Romania, Monetaria Statului.

4. The Aeronautical Virtue Order ”Ordinul Virtutea Aeronautica”

The Order was founded on the 31st of July 1930 by King Charles II in four classes to award meritorious acts and service in the sphere of military aviation during times of war and peace. It was awarded exclusively to members of Air forces, with posthumous awards also possible. Flyers who had received the Knights Cross of the Order of Michael the Brave, automatically received the Knights Cross of this Order too. Since the 19th of November 1938, the Order could be awarded with the so called “war ribbon” and crossed Swords running through the centre of the Sign of the Order. Any Class of the Order received for service during times of war was also decorated with a green enamelled laurel leaf wreath.

During the course of this Romania series I have also tried to shed some light on the history of Romania and that of its Kings since the two share a longstanding connection. While there are still numerous Orders to study, our royal biographies have reached the last King who ruled the Kingdom of Romania; Michael I.

Michael (rom. Mihai) was born on the 25th of October 1921 in the castle of Peleş in Sinaia, Romania, as the only child of then Crown Prince Charles of Romania and Helen, Princess of Greece. The early childhood of Michael was deeply affected by his parent’s marital crisis that reached its peak in 1925 when Charles travelled Paris with the daughter of a Chemist, Elena Lupescu, in 1925. It was this moment when Charles gave up his status and title as Crown Prince. The position was then transferred with an act of Parliament to Michael, who at the time only six years old. After King Ferdinand I died of cancer on the 20th of July 1927, Michael was crowned as the King of Romania as Michael I. Due to his young age, a 3-man regency was appointed to rule the country in his stead. This arrangement was not to last. When Romania started to feel the full effects of a world wide recession that landed in Europe in the last years of the 1920s, the regency failed to govern the nation as well as the people expected, it began to lose credibility.

Sensing an opportunity, Charles returned to Romania in 1930 and was crowned King Charles II after a successful Coup d’Etat¹². The deteriorated relations between Michael’s parents finally lead to Charles finally ordering Helen to leave the country in 1932. After this Michael was able to see his mother only occasionally up to 1940. During the following years Michael received a through education hand-tailored by Charles, interrupted by ceremonies and parades. Despite a good general education, he was kept in the dark about the day-to-day administration of the country.

¹² Described in more detail in the previous article.

Michael's life changed forever in the early days of September 1940, when King Charles was forced in to exile after disastrous foreign policy decisions that cased his popularity to plummet with the people, politicians and especially with the Armed Forces. This time it was for good. Michael was Crowned King of Romania as Michael I for the second time on the 6th of September 1940. The real power however rested with General Ion Antonescu, who had been given dictatorial powers by Charles. Antonescu invited Michaels mother Helen back to Romania shortly after coming to power, but relations between the old general and the young Monarch remained cool and restrained. Like Charles, Antonescu kept Michael in the dark of the day-to-day matters of governing the nation. The circumstances of how Michael was informed of the declaration of war against the Soviet Union in the midnight of the 22nd of June 1941 best describes the situation; he learned of it an hour later from an army officer.

Despite the fact that war in the East first went according to the Germans' plans, it soon became clear that Romania's Armed forces were not ready to fight a war of this magnitude. Romanian forces accounted for 12 % of the Axis field strength on the Eastern Front in the months of August and September, but suffered 30 % of the total losses. After Romanian forces had captured Bessarabia and Buchovina with German support, it was the opinion of the Royal House, leaders of the political parties and numerous army officers that Romania had achieved their objectives in the war and no further advances into Russian territory was necessary. Field Marshal¹³ Antonescu believed that in order to have Hitler's full backing in the territorial re-arrangements that were sure to follow the collapse of the Soviet Union, Romanian forces should render all possible support to the Wehrmacht. This strategy was slowly but surely bleeding the Romanian Army dry.

War in the East took a turn for the worse in the winter of 1942, especially after Stalingrad and a small core group began to gather around the King, who resisted German influence in the country and wanted to rid Romania of the exceedingly costly war. In the early months of 1944 even the Germanophile Antonescu began to see that the war was lost and Romanian diplomats began to send feelers for a separate peace with the Allies. The negotiations moved ahead slowly and according to the Russian view, any agreement reciprocated a freedom of movement across all Romanian lands for the Red Army, which was impossible for the Marshal to accept. The King and his inner circle concluded that the only way to save the country from total destruction was to stage a coup.

The Coup d'Etat was successfully carried out on the 23rd of August 1944, when only few German troops were within Romanian borders and Antonescu with his closest advisors were taken prisoner¹⁴. In a radio broadcast later the same day, King Michael announced that Romania had cut all diplomatic ties to Germany and made a ceasefire with the Allies. The post-coup government was formed by the political parties that made up the opposition, aptly named the National Democratic Front. Red Army's spearheads arrived on the outskirts of Bucharest a week later. In the following months, as per the ceasefire

¹³ King Michael had promoted Antonescu Field Marshal on the 22nd of August 1941 for his role in the recovery of Buchovina and Bessarabia.

¹⁴ King Michael later received the Order of Victory from the Soviet Union and U. S. Legion of Merit in the rank of Chief Commander for his role in the coup.

agreement, units of the Romanian Army fought against the Germans until the German surrender in May of 1945.

During the next years the small Romanian communist party used the power that the occupying Red Army brought, to the fullest extent. The growing weight of this effect was felt by the first post-coup Prime Minister, General Sănătescu, who resigned on the 2nd of December 1944 after he realised that his government was fast becoming ineffectual. The next government was formed by General Rădescu, whose term expired on the last days of February 1945, after the Soviet 1st vice foreign Minister Vyshinsky brought an ultimatum before the King, preceded by communist demonstrations and violent attacks on peaceful pro-government rallies.

Without backing from the West and with the Red Army occupying the country, King Michael, who ruled by the last democratic constitution of Romania dating to 1923, was powerless stop the worse events that were soon to come. The governments that followed Rădescu's were tightly in the hands of Romanian communists, who took their instructions directly from Moscow. Within the next two years communists took control of all the essential ministries, cleansed the military of royalist officers and started to isolate the palace. During the fall of 1947 it became impossible even to smuggle an English newspaper into the palace.

When communists were already in de facto control of the nation, getting rid of the Monarchy became only a matter of time. King Michael was allowed to depart for England with the Queen mother for the wedding of Princess Elisabeth and Prince Philip on the 12th of October 1947¹⁵. It was during this trip that Michael first met his future wife, Princess Anna of Bourbon Parma. Soon there was talk of marriage, though the union was postponed due to the uncertain situation in Romania.

Michael returned with his mother to Romania on the 21st of December 1947 with the days of the Kingdom drawing to a close. Communist forces started to disarm the Royal Guard on the 30th of December, reliable troops of the Tudor Vladimirescu - Division were concentrated around the palace and telephone lines to the palace were cut. The coup de grace came to the Palace in the form of the Chairman of the Romanian communist party, Gheorghe Gheorgiu-Dej and Prime Minister Groza. Surrounded by troops loyal to the communists, cut off from the outside world and threatened with the execution of innocent people¹⁶ Michael was forced to give in and he abdicated. Romania was declared a People's Republic in the same evening. Michael went into exile with some his relatives and members of his court on the 31st of December 1947.

Years Michael spent in exile were filled with the joys and sorrows of a regular family life, mixed with closely observing the developments that took place in Romania and regular contact with other exiles. Michael married Princess Anna on the 10th of June 1948 in

¹⁵ Iuliu Maniu, last of the leaders of the old democratic parties of Romania, the National Peasant Party, was sentenced to solitary life imprisonment based on falsified evidence.

¹⁶ Over a thousand students were previously arrested during anti-communist demonstrations in Bucharest.

Athens, the host being King Paul I¹⁷ of Greece. The Marriage gave the couple five daughters: Princesses Margaretha (b. 1949), Elena (b. 1950), Irina (b. 1953), Sofia (b. 1957) and Marie (b. 1964). Apart from being a father Michael worked as an airplane mechanic and a commercial pilot and the family even tried growing chickens while they were living in Great Britain.¹⁸

While the communist regime was in power in Romania, Michael had no hopes of returning to his homeland¹⁹ and the situation began to improve only after the overthrow of the regime in 1989. Old communists still in power continued to thwart Michael's attempts at visiting Romania, until finally he received permission from President Iliescu to visit Romania "as a private citizen" in the spring of 1992. This Easter visit was a great success, so great in fact that he wasn't allowed back until 1997.

Michael's citizenship was restored in 1997 and after this point on, relations between the Romanian government became much more correct. He later acted as a semi-official ambassador for Romania as the country strove toward membership within the NATO, a goal that was achieved in 2004. Today the old palace of Elisabeta and a house that Michael had bought in 1942 in Săvârșin are once again used by the Royal House and Michael has an officially recognised status as a former head of state.

Though Michael ruled Romania as a King for about 10 years, most of this time he was forced to powerlessly witness the sad events that befell Romania, first as an adolescent youth and later being suppressed by two totalitarian regimes. But when chance came, as in the last years of the Second World War, Michael showed that he was able to act decisively and competently as a head of state. In these final years of the Kingdom Michael also proved to possess two qualities that his father, Charles II, had lacked: a strong sense of duty and moral courage.

The Order during the Era of the Kingdom 1930-1947

Signs of the Order

The Sign of the Order is a Cross, which' upright arms are from a Lily Cross and horizontal arms consist of three wings mounted on top of each other, on either side of the centre, growing in length upwards. The Crosses' arms are coated with blue enamel, with the edges being silver in the Class of Knight and silver gilt on the higher Classes of Officer and Commander. The centre of the Cross bears the Royal Eagle of Romania, on a white surface, with the monogram of the ruling Monarch found in its chest: 1st type (1930-40) the double C of Charles II and on the 2nd type (1940-47) the "M" of Michael I.

¹⁷ The Queen mother Helen was born Princess of Greece and King Paul's wife was Princess Elisabeth of Romania.

¹⁸ Since the Communists had seized all Royal property in Romania and there were very few funds abroad, the Royal family had work for a living in exile, even with occasional assistance from friends and relatives.

¹⁹ The Communist government had revoked the passports of the Royal family and that of its closest supporters (a total of 35 persons) on the 20th of February 1948.

The reverse centre holds the founding year of the Order, 1930. The lowest Class, the Gold Cross, is otherwise the same, but is made entirely of gilded bronze. Crosses of the military division have crossed swords running through their centre. Knights crosses and higher awarded during times of war have an additional laurel wreath surrounding the centre. There were no limitations set for the conferring of this Order and besides Romanian Aviation personnel it was often awarded to personnel of the German Luftwaffe during WW 2.

Class description

Commander

Worn on a broad ribbon around the neck, diameter of the Cross either 58,5 or 58,8 mm. Blue enamel and gilded silver

Officer

Worn on a small ribbon on the left side of the chest, diameter 43 mm. Blue enamel and gilded silver.

Knight

As above, but with silver base material.

Gold Cross

Worn as above, diameter 42,5 mm and made entirely of gilded bronze.

If the same person was awarded with the Knights Cross or the Gold Cross twice or more times, he could wear a 40 mm wide and 10 mm high bar in the ribbon of the Cross, with the material depending on the Class.

Ribbon

Light lilac with silver centre and side stripes.

Class	Width	Stripes
Commander	65 mm	4, 5 mm
Officer	35 mm	3 mm
Knight	35 mm	3 mm
Gold Cross	35 mm	3 mm

The so called "war ribbon" is otherwise the same, but with added 3 mm golden edges.

The Order was manufactured by, among others, Rudolf Souval in Wien and Fa. Karnet in Prag.

The Medal of the Aeronautical Virtue Order "Medalia Virtutea Aeronautica"

The Medal in its three classes was founded by King Charles II on the 24th of February as an extension of the Orders higher classes. It was awarded to non-commissioned officers of the Romanian Air Force, especially to pilots. Crossed swords were added to the Medal

for Merit during time of war on the 26th of November 1937 and after the 19th of December 1938 the Medal with swords was promoted to the status of a bravery decoration and so could be awarded with the war ribbon. As was the case with the higher classes of the Order, the medal was also often awarded to personnel of the German Luftwaffe during WW 2.

The Obverse of the medal holds a figure symbolising aviators, wearing a winged helmet. Reverse holds the Royal Romanian Eagle with wings spread behind it and alongside a laurel leaf wreath, it surrounds the legend "Pentru Aeronautica 1931" (For the Aviation). The only distinguishing feature between the classes of the medal is material: Gilded for the 1st Class, silvered for the 2nd and bronze for the 3rd Class. Their diameter fluctuates between 33 and 34 millimetres and are worn on a small ribbon on the left side of the chest.

Ribbon: 35 mm, watered light blue with a 3 mm silver centre stripe.

War ribbon: 35 mm, watered light blue with a 3 mm silver centre stripe and 3 mm golden edges.

The Order today

The Aeronautical Virtue Order was re-established with the law no. 29/2000 and given final form through law no. 260/2002. It is conferred upon Romanian and foreign citizens who have displayed merit in the field of aeronautics. The Order is conferred on Romanians on the 1st of December (the National day of Romania) and the Order itself is celebrated on the 20th of July, on the day of Saint Elias, the Patron Saint of the Air Forces. The Order has gone through some visual changes, in addition to the new Class of Grand Officer being added.

The Romanian Eagle has lost its Crown and the Monarchs monogram has disappeared from its chest for obvious reasons. Some changes have taken place in the reverse as well. The borders of the wings that used to continue up to the centre have now been shortened and replaced with the legend "VIRTUTEA AERONAUTICA" (aeronautical virtue) and the significant years of the Order have been placed at the tips of the Lily; "1930" (up) and "2000" (down). The Knight and Officer Classes measure 44 mm X 50 mm and the Commander and Grand Officer 55 mm X 50 mm. The Grand Officers Star consists of eight groups of seven silver rays that circle the centre. The centre is made up of a golden Romanian eagle on a white background surrounded by a golden legend "VIRTUTEA AERONAUTICA" on a blue enamel background with a green enamel laurel leaf beneath it. The reverse holds the Stars fastening pin. The diameter of the Star is 75 mm. Military division crosses are signified by a laurel wreath surrounding the centre and can be awarded with crossed swords running through the centre of the Cross.

The Ribbon of the Order is now 40 mm wide with the Knight and Officers Classes and 45 mm with the Commander and Grand Officer. The Ribbon is light blue with a white 2 mm centre stripe and 4 mm edges, edges being 0, 5 mm wider with the Classes of

Commander and Grand Officer. Ribbon for the Officer also contains a rosette. War Ribbon has golden edges as with the Kingdom Era Order.

Conferral restrictions and Conferrals

The Orders number of peace time Romanian conferrals is limited as follows:

Class	Military	Civil
Grand Officer	25	10
Commander	95	20
Officer	180	70
Knight	450	150

The maximum number of Romanian Knights in peace time is thus limited to a 1000.

Numbers conferred:

Class	Military	with Swords	Civil
Grand Officer	2	2	-
Commander	10	10	2
Officer	29	2	8
Knight	155	-	32
Total	196	14	42

The Order has been conferred to a total of 252 Romanians, two of them posthumously. As of yet, the Order has not been awarded to any foreign citizens.

The Medal of the Order today

Only minor modifications have been made to the appearance of the Medal despite the long hiatus. The obverse has remained basically the same and the Eagle in the reverse has changed into a republican. In addition the reverse legend now follows the form: "1930 / VIRTUTEA / AERONAUTICA / 2000". The material remains the only separating feature between classes and a Military Medal is distinguished from a Civil one by a half sized laurel wreath used as an attachment device for the ribbon. As with the higher Classes, all three Classes of the Medals can be conferred with swords for Merit during times of War. The diameter of the Medals is 35 mm and the ribbon is 35 mm wide, light blue with white 4 mm stripes 1 mm away from the edges.

The awarding of the 2nd and the 3rd Classes has not been limited, but the maximum number of Romanian peace time awardees of the 1st Class has been capped at a 1000, divided between 650 Military and 350 Civil recipients.

Medals conferred:

Class	Military	with Swords	Civil
1 st Class	71	1	50
2 nd Class	106	-	67
3 rd Class	207	-	103
Total	384	1	220

So far the Medal has been awarded to 605 Romanians and like the Order itself, no awards to foreign citizens has yet been made. Both the Order and the Medal are manufactured by the state mint of Romania, Monetaria Statului

5. The Maritime Virtue Order ”Ordinul Virtutea Maritimă”

As the first form of this Order was a decoration that was founded during the Kingdom Era, it's best to start this study there.

The Maritime Virtue Medal ”Medalia Maritimă” / ”Medalia Virtutea Maritimă”

The first form of this Order was founded by King Charles II on the 13th of November 1936 with royal decree no. 2670. It was awarded to seamen and other persons who had displayed merit in connection with maritime affairs. It consisted of three Classes 1-3 and these Classes were further divided according to if the recipient was a professional seaman or not. Medals given to seamen were surmounted by a royal crown. After the 26th of November 1937 the Medal could be awarded with swords for merit during times of war. On the 5th of August 1938 the Medal was given the status of a bravery decoration and its name changed to the form ”*Medalia Virtutea Maritimă*”. According to royal decree no. 2775, given on the 19th of December 1938, the Medal with swords could be awarded with the so called war ribbon.

The Obverse of the Medal holds an image of an old-fashioned sailing vessel with its crew going through rough seas and beneath it, the monogram of the current Monarch. The reverse holds an anchor surrounded by its iron chain and with the legend “PENTRU MARINA” (For the Navy) in the centre. The following awarding limitations were observed when the medal was awarded to Romanian citizens during peace time: 1st Class 100, 2nd Class 300 and 3rd Class 1000.

Class description

1st Class

Worn on a small ribbon on the left side of the chest, gilded and polished. Diameter between 30, 6 and 35, 5 mm.

2nd Class

Worn as above, silvered and with the same diameter.

3rd Class

Worn as above, red brownish bronze with the same diameter.

Ribbon: 35 mm, not watered, silver with three blue centre stripes (width 3 mm)

War ribbon: 35 mm, otherwise the same, but with 3 mm golden edges.

From a Decoration to an Order

During the great Order and Decoration reform of 2000, the old medal, abolished in December of 1947, was expanded into a 4-Class Order with the Medal and its three Classes beneath. As the previous Medal, the Order is conferred on Romanian and foreign citizens who have displayed merit in the maritime field. The regulations of the Order were given form with the law no. 461 of 2002. The Order is conferred to Romanians on the National day of Romania, the 1st of December.

Signs of the Order

The Sign of the Order consist of a blue enamelled anchor Cross, which holds the Eagle of Romania in its centre on a white background. The ribbon is attached to the Cross via a green enamelled laurel wreath. The Military Division of the Order is separated from the civil one by a green enamelled laurel wreath that connects the arms of the Cross. Military division crosses can also be conferred with swords running through the centre of the Cross. The edges of the Cross and the Eagle in the obverse centre are either silver, with the Knight, or silver gilt with other classes. The reverse holds the name of the Order “VIRTUTEA MARITIMA” (maritime virtue) and the significant years of the Order are placed at the tips of the anchor: 1936 (up) and 2000 (below). The Knight and the Officer classes measure 44 X 50 mm and the Commander and Grand Officer 55 X 50 mm. The Grand Officers Star consists of eight groups of seven silver rays that circle the centre. The centre itself is made up of a golden Romanian Eagle on a white base, surrounded by the golden legend “VIRTUTEA MARITIMA” on a blue enamel base. In addition there is a green enamel laurel leaf beneath the Eagle and the Stars obverse holds an attachment pin. Diameter of the Star is 75 mm.

Ribbon of the Order is 40 mm wide with the Classes of Knight and Officer and 45 mm wide with the Commander and Grand Officer. The ribbon is white with light blue 2 mm centre stripe and 4 mm edges with the edges being 4, 5 mm wide with the Classes of Commander and Grand Officer. As before, the war ribbon has added golden edges to distinguish it from a normal ribbon.

Conferral restrictions and conferred Crosses

The Orders Romanian Knights during peace time are limited as follows:

Class	Military	Civil
Grand Officer	12	8
Commander	55	25
Officer	120	80
Knight	180	150

Thus the maximum number of Knights is set at 650.

Crosses of the Order conferred:

Class	Military	with Swords	Civil
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Grand Officer	1	2	1
Commander	7	1	3
Officer	17	-	10
Knight	75	-	41
Total	100	3	55

The Order has so far been conferred to a total of 158 Romanians. The Order hasn't been conferred on any foreign citizens.

The Medal today

Only minor changes have taken place in the outward appearance of the Medal. The monogram of the Monarch has been replaced by the National Coat of Arms of Romania and the significant years of the Order (1936 and 2000) have been added to the reverse. The three Classes of the Medal are only separated by the material of the medals: Gold plated silver for the 1st Class, silver for the 2nd and copper for the 3rd. Military and Civil Medals are separated by the laurel wreath used as a ribbon attachment for the Military variety. Like the higher classes of the Order all classes of the Medal can be awarded with swords for merit during times of war.

Diameter of the Medals is 35 mm and the ribbon is 35 mm wide, white with 4 mm light blue side stripes 1 mm away from the edges.

The Awarding of the 2nd and 3rd Classes has not been limited, but the Awarding of the 1st Class to Romanian citizens during peace time has been capped at 650, divided into 325 military and 325 civil awards.

Awarded Medals:

Class	Military	with Swords	Civil
1 st Class	32	-	40
2 nd Class	47	-	66
3 rd Class	101	-	121
Total	180	0	227

The Medal of the Maritime Virtue Order has been awarded to 407 Romanian citizens and as of yet, no foreign citizens has been awarded with this Medal. Both the Order and its Medal are manufactured by the state mint of Romania, Monetaria Statului.

6. The Military Virtue Order “Ordinul Virtutea Militară”

Rewarding the bravery of ordinary soldiers first became a practice during the Roman Republic, when a Roman citizen, even an ordinary legionnaire, could win the *corona civica*, the civic crown, for saving the life of another citizen on the field of battle. Other ways of decorating a distinguished soldier was to award him with a decorated weapon, a custom favoured by Napoleon before he founded the Legion of Honour in 1802. Awarding decorations to be worn first became customary during the French revolutionary wars 1792-1802.

The earliest form of the Order that is object of study in this article was the *Pro Virtute Militari*, founded by prince Alexander Ioan Cuza of Romania in 1860 to award Romanian soldiers who participated in the battle of Dealul Spirii in 1848 against the Ottoman Empire. This was followed by the “Virtutea Militară” (military virtue) medal of 1864 that was awarded for bravery and devotion, though both of these awards were soon disbanded as Cuza’s regime came to an end in 1866.

The next decoration, the *medalia Virtutea Militară*, was founded by Prince and later King Charles I in 1866. This decoration, to be changed into a long service award for non-commissioned officers and enlisted men in 1880, was awarded for bravery during the war of Romanian independence, also known as the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78. In what follows, we are going to study the dual genesis of today’s Military Virtue Order.

Military Virtue Medal (peace time) ”Medalia Virtutea Militară de pace”

Prince Charles I founded this award with the permission of the High Porte in 1866 and it was awarded to non-commissioned officers 12 years of distinguished service. This award was transformed into a decoration by two royal decrees (24.5.1872 & 5/17.7.1872) with two classes with the 1st being awarded to officers and the 2nd to non-commissioned officers. Henceforth it could be awarded for any meritorious acts in addition to distinguished long service. And so it could be awarded to soldiers for bravery beyond the call of duty during the war of 1877-78. During this war its 1st Class was awarded to lieutenant Munsterhjelm of the Russian Imperial Guards 3rd Finnish sharpshooter battalion. On the 25th of November 1880 the decoration was changed back into a long service award, when another decoration was founded to be awarded as a bravery decoration. As a long service award it could be award to members of the gendarme, for showing civic courage outside the battlefield and it could also be awarded posthumously and to women.

Description of the medal

The obverse consists of the left facing head of Prince Charles, surrounded by the legend ” * CAROL I. DOMN AL ROMANIEI” (Charles, Prince of Romania). The reverse holds the legend “VIRTUTE MILITARA” (military virtue) surrounded by a laurel- and oak wreath. The medal is attached to its ribbon via a laurel wreath tied together. 1st and 2nd classes are similar with the exception of the material, 1st class being silver gilt and the 2nd class silver.

Ribbon²⁰ (-1872): 30 mm, watered, red with 4 mm light blue side stripes 1 mm away from the edges.

Ribbon (-1872): 40 mm, otherwise similar.

Medal of military bravery ”*Medalia Virtutea Militară de război*”

This bravery decoration for non-commissioned offices and enlisted men was founded by Prince Charles I in two classes by royal decree no. 2698 on the 25th of November 1880. When the Order of Michael the Brave was founded on the 21st of December 1916, this decoration became the highest award for bravery for non-commissioned offices and enlisted men. Other similar decorations were for example; the Medal of the Military Order of Charles Fredrick of Baden and Prussian Pour le Mérite for non-commissioned offices and enlisted men.

After the 25th of December 1916 recipients of the decoration were entitled to a monthly pension. Other financial and material benefits followed with royal decrees given on the 5th of May 1933 and 1936. Medal continued to be awarded during WW 2.

Description of the medal

1st type

The sign of the medal is a cross pattée, which strait arms are circled by a *laurel* wreath attached to the centre. The centre holds the left facing head of Charles I, surrounded by the legend ” * CAROL I. DOMN AL ROMANIEI” (Charles, Prince of Romania). The reverse centre holds the legend “VIRTUTE MILITARA” (military virtue). The only thing separating the two classes is material, the 1st class being silver or bronze gilt and the 2nd silver or silvered bronze.

Diameters: Cross, 36-38 m, centre 18 mm.

2nd type

Similar to the 1st type apart from the proportions, but with curved arms and an *oak leaf* wreath placed a part from the centre. This type started to be manufactured between 1916 and 1919 and was manufactured during WW 2.

Diameters: Cross, 31, 5-32, 5 m, centre 18-19 mm.

Ribbon: 30-38 mm wide, watered red with 5 mm light blue side stripes.

²⁰ This is the ribbon that has been widely used as a sign for military bravery in numerous Romanian Orders.

War ribbon: Otherwise the same but with added 3 mm golden edges.

As an Order of the Republic

The Military Virtue Order was founded in four classes with the law 29/2000 in March of 2000 and its regulations given final form with the law no. 459 of 2000. It is conferred to distinguished Romanian soldiers and civilians during times of peace and war and also to foreign citizens. While conferring this Order to civilians might seem strange to some, it must be remembered that for instance, civilian contractors have an increasingly large role in supporting combat troops in conflict zones. The Order is conferred to Romanian citizens, as is custom, on the national day of Romania, the 1st of December whilst the Order is celebrated on the 23rd of April, during the feast of Saint George²¹.

Signs of the Order

The sign of the Order is a blue enamelled cross pattée, which' curved arms are circled by a green enamelled laurel- and oak wreath clearly separated from the centre. The centre holds a Romanian eagle on blue base, surrounded by the legend " * * * VIRTUTEA MILITARA " (military virtue) on a white base. The reverse centre holds the image of Saint George (obverse eagle, edges and this image are silver with the class of Knight and gilded silver with higher classes). This image is surrounded by the important historic years of the Order " * 1864²² * 1872²³ * 1940²⁴ * 2000 " on a white base. The cross is attached to its ribbon via a green enamelled laurel- and oak wreath. All classes of the Order can be awarded with crossed swords running through the centre of the cross for merit during times of war.

The diameter of the Knight and Officer classes is 42 mm and 53 mm with the Commander and the Grand Officer. The Grand Officers Star consists of eight groups of seven silver rays that circle the centre. The centre itself is made up of a golden Romanian eagle on a white base, surrounded by the golden legend "VIRTUTEA MILITARA" on a blue enamel base. In addition there is a green enamel laurel leaf beneath the Eagle and the Stars obverse holds an attachment pin. Diameter of the Star is 75 mm. With the exception of the legend in the centre this star is identical with the design of Grand Officer Stars of the Aeronautical Virtue and Maritime Virtue Orders.

Ribbon of the Order is 40 mm wide with the classes of Knight and Officer and 45 mm wide with the Commander and Grand Officer. Officer's ribbon is distinguished from the Knight by a rosette. The ribbon is red with blue side stripes 2 mm away from the edges with blue stripes also having added 1 mm thick silver inward sides. The blue stripes are 4 mm wide with the Classes of Knight and Officer and 4, 5 mm wide with Commander and

²¹ Saint George is the patron saint of Romania's land forces.

²² The year when Alexander Ioan Cuza founded the medal "Virtutea Militară".

²³ The "medalia Virtutea Militară" founded by Charles I became a two-class decoration and could be awarded for acts of bravery in addition to long service.

²⁴ Charles II founded the short-lived Order of Saint George on the 8th of March 1940.

Grand Officer Classes. As before, the war ribbon has added golden edges to distinguish it from a normal ribbon.

Conferral restrictions and conferred Crosses

The Orders Romanian Knights during peace time are limited as follows:

Class	Military	Civil
Grand Officer	110	40
Commander	600	150
Officer	1200	300
Knight	4000	600

Thus the maximum number of Knights is therefore set at 7000.

Crosses of the Order conferred 2002-2008

Class	Military	with Swords	Civil	Foreign
Grand Officer	13	20	-	2
Commander	33	77	8	7
Officer	92	51	19	14
Knight	661	48	105	11
Total	799	196	132	34

The Order has been conferred to a total of 1127 Romanian citizens and 34 foreign citizens.

The medal of the Order during times of peace

The medal is awarded for the same merit as the higher classes, but for non-commissioned officers and enlisted men in military and to civilians of similar rank or status.

The obverse of the medal holds the national coat of arms of Romania surrounded by a string of pearls. The reverse holds the legend "1872 / VIRTUTE MILITARA / 2000" surrounded by an oak wreath. The three Classes of the Medal are separated only by the material of the medals: Gold plated silver for the 1st Class, silver for the 2nd and copper for the 3rd. Military and civil medals are separated by the laurel wreath used as a ribbon attachment for the military variety. Diameter of the Medals is 35 mm and the ribbon is 35 mm wide, red with 4 mm blue side stripes 1 mm away from the edges.

The awarding of the 2nd and 3rd Classes has not been limited, but the awarding of the 1st Class to Romanian citizens has been capped at 7000, divided into 5000 military and 2000 civil awards.

Awarded Medals:

Class	Military	Civil	Foreign
1 st Class	603	241	2
2 nd Class	780	322	-
3 rd Class	1484	474	-
Total	2767	1037	2

The peace time medal of Military Virtue Order has been awarded to 3804 Romanian Citizens and 2 foreign citizens.

The medal of the Order during times of war

The wartime division of this medal is the non-commissioned and enlisted men what the Order of Michael the Brave is to Officers. No-one has yet shown the bravery and level of virtue required and hence either of its two classes has been awarded since the reinstitution of the Order.

The cross used as the sign of the medal is very much like the sign of the Military Virtue Order, but there are differences. First of all, the centre holds the Romanian coat of arms and reverse centre holds the legend “1880 / VIRTUTI MILITARA / 2000”. In addition, the cross is made fully of either gold plated silver (1st class) or silver (2nd class). The cross is attached to its ribbon via a laurel and oak wreath. The diameter of the cross is 35 mm and its ribbon is otherwise similar with the peace time medal, but it has golden edges.

Both the Order and its medals are manufactured by the state mint of Romania, Monetaria Statului.

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